



TAYLOR TIDBITS

COLORECTAL CANCER

According to the American Cancer Society colorectal cancer is still one of the most common cancers in men and women in the United States. Almost 150,000 cases will be reported this year and we will see approximately 50,000 deaths in the United States from colorectal cancer. Despite the myths, men and women are affected equally and it is somewhat more common in African-Americans.

Prevention of colon cancer starts with knowing your history. People who have a first degree relative who have been diagnosed with colon cancer or the polyps that can lead to colon cancer carry an increased risk of developing the disease over their life time. Also, the way we eat affects our risk. Research that is now over 40 years old demonstrates that a diet high in fruits and vegetables (high fiber) can be preventative in the development of colorectal cancers as well as other medical disorders such as gallbladder disease and heart disease. Screening is also one of the most important factors in prevention of colorectal cancer. Starting in your 30s annual hemoccult tests, which that a small amount of stool and tests it for blood is easy, inexpensive and very sensitive to the presence of colorectal cancer. Colonoscopy, however, is considered the best screening method.

Colonoscopy is a procedure where a very slender flexible tube is used to evaluate the entire inner surface of the colon, usually done under some type of anesthesia. Colonoscopy is the most sensitive way to find polyps before they have had a chance to become cancers. A therapeutic colonoscopy actually removes these polyps with a series of small instruments that fit through the scope. The procedure itself takes usually 30 to 40 minutes, is very well tolerated and only requires a prep the preceding day. All Americans over the age of 50 should have their initial screening colonoscopy. Further exams depend on your family history and what is found at the initial colonoscopy. Your provider will counsel you on when it is best for you to follow up with colonoscopy based on those two factors.

Some patients require screening at an earlier age. You should consider screening at a younger age if you have a first degree relative who was diagnosed with the disease prior to age 50. Most physicians would recommend screening 10 years in advance of the age of your relative if they were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and approximately 5 years in advance of a first degree relative was noted to have precancerous polyps at an early stage in life.

By knowing your history and when it is time to begin screening, eating right and performing regular colonoscopy, colon cancer is entirely preventable.

To sum it up – if you are over 50 and have not had your colonoscopy; see your provider this week.

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